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Creating Access with Technology

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Creating Access with an Technology

Abstract

Encompass Head Start and Early Head Starts main office located in Watsonville, CA, is where the behind the scenes work for the 18 toddler sites within Santa Cruz county is performed; including designing methods for family recruitment. Encompass Head Start and Early Head Start has been designated as Chronically Under Enrolled for its continuous trend of under enrollment in its programs, with Early Head Starts Home Base/ Home Visitors program impacted the most. An online form was implemented to add to the methods of collecting applications for Encompass Early Head Start Home Base/ Home Visitors program. Families will have more access to Encompass Early Head Start by having the option to send an online application form instead of submitting a paper form. Encompass Head Start and Early Head Start will increase its availability to its audience by having more of an online presence.

The amount of applications submitted through the online form between October 29th and November 29th, 2018, was one, compared to the amount of online applications received in 2017 from October 29th to November 29th which was zero. Although the number of applications submitted was low, Encompass Head Start and Early Head Start gained a valuable tool for recruitment. It is recommended the online application be reviewed every year to make sure the questions being asked are relevant. It is also recommended the rest of the programs offered by Encompass Head Start and Early Head Start adopt an online application as well.

Keywords: Encompass Head Start, Home Base program, Chronically Under Enrolled, Online Application Form, ChildPlus, Santa Cruz County.

Agency and communities served

Encompass Head Start is part the umbrella organization Encompass Community Services in Santa Cruz county. On their website, it is mentioned Encompass Community Services is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, and has been serving Santa Cruz County since 1973 (Encompass, n.d). Encompass offers approximately 40 programs that provide services in behavioral health, family and social well being, housing, early childhood education, and more. Encompass Community Services also offers access to services such as housing, counseling for family, youth, and individuals, reentry services, health and financial services, and Head Start and pre-k (Encompass, n.d).

Within Encompass Community Services, there are four categories of services provided (Encompass, n.d). **Youth Services** provides support to children, teens, and families, in order to find solutions to issues that might come about at home, school, and among their peers. **Community Support Services** serves individuals who are “experiencing poverty, challenges associated with mental health, HIV/AIDS, or have been a foster youth” (Encompass, n.d). **Community Recovery Services** provides support for people who have experienced substance abuse. Head Start and Early Head Start are part of the **Child and Family Development Program** (Encompass, n.d).

The Child and Family Development Program is dedicated to connect families to services to ensure their children are prepared for school. It is imperative these infants and

toddlers have that foundation CFDP (Child and Family Development Program) provides in order to have a more successful future; The programs CFDP offers make sure its children are healthy and prepared. Besides Head Start, CFDP offers programs such as Papás which involves children's fathers learning the importance of being involved, as well as how to be involved in their child's education (Encompass, n.d).

Encompass Head Start's (and Early Head Start) mission is "Families, Staff, and Community United for the well being of Children" (Encompass Annual Report, 2018). Head Start offers a few different programs within its program. All of these programs offer referrals to community services and agencies. Head Start and Early Head Start provide a holistic approach when providing services to the children and their families (Encompass, n.d).

Eligible participants for Encompass Head Start (and Early Head Start) includes: families who receive TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) and/or SSI (Supplemental Security Income), families living within the income guidelines, families taking care of a foster child, and children who have a disability where the child is provided with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or an Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP), (Encompass Community Services, n.d).

Encompass Head Start offers seven **part-day program** daycare centers where children attend **four** days a week and **three and a half hours** a day, and seven

extended day program daycare centers where children attend **four** days a week and **six hours** a day (Head Start/ Early Head Start application, n.d). These services are offered to children **three to five years old**.

Early Head Start offers four **extended day program** daycare centers where children attend five days a week and six and a half hours a day. This service is offered to toddlers **18 months to 36 months**, however in the **Home Base program**, the services start from **birth** (including pregnant mothers) to **3 years of age**. The **Home Base Program** has a home visitor visit the child's home, and teach the parents skills where they would then teach their child. The home visitor visits the home **once a week** for one and a half hours a day. Besides the home visits, the Home Base Program includes two socialization groups a month where the children have the opportunity to develop socialization skills (Head Start/ Early Head Start application, n.d).

ERSEA (Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment, and Attendance) at Encompass Head Start is the group of staff within the Head Start program responsible for processing the applications and recruitment. They are currently developing new methods of recruitment in order to address the current under enrollment issue. One of the projects the intern assisted was the Parent Ambassador program where current Head Start parents are actively recruiting more families on their own time.

The Problem

There has been a trend of under enrollment for Head Start/ Early Headstart for the past few years. According to the software “ChildPlus” (software responsible for collecting Head Starts and Early Head Start data), for the school year of **2014 to 2015**, there were **72** children on the its waiting list at any given time for Early Head Start Home Base program (ChildPlus, 2018). For the following school year (**2015 to 2016**) , there were **71** children on the waiting list. For the school year of **2016 to 2017**, there were **63**. The low number of children on the waiting list demonstrated the lack of applicants interested in the program. For the year **2018 to 2019**, there are about **47** children on the waiting list, but there are about 60 vacancies (McCabe, 2018). The ERSEA team works hard to make sure the applications are processed quickly, and once those 47 children are placed in the program, there are still going to be vacancies.

According to the American Fact Finder (2016), about **4881** families with children ages five and under live under the poverty level in Santa Cruz County. In the school year of **2016-2017**, according to the Encompass Head Start’s Annual Report (2018), there were **655** children (and their families) served. This means there are more than 4000 qualified children in Santa Cruz county who are not receiving services from Head Start, or are not on the waitlist.

The Causes

The new generation of parents Head Start is serving is teen parents, or Generation Z. Generation Z as described in the article “Generational traits and media trends” (MNI

Targeted media inc, 2015), is the population born between 1995 to 2007. According to the Kids Data website (2018), in 2013, 18.8 out of 1000 births in Santa Cruz county were from teen mothers. Generation Z is the generation born in a world where internet access is always available (MNI Targeted media inc., 2015). 100% of Generation Z is on the internet at least one hour a day (or more), and about 46 % percent of Generation Z spends more than ten hours a day online (MNI Targeted media inc., 2015). Only 90% of generation X however (population born between 1965-1976) uses the internet daily, and about 60% would take note of an ad on paper print such as in a magazine; 51 % would actually take action when seeing such ad (MNI Targeted media inc., 2015). Encompass Head Start is still reaching Generation X with paper forms and paper advertisements, but has unintentionally neglected Generation Z by not being as present in the digital world.

Besides Generation Z and X, other generations utilize the internet as well. Around 96% of Millennials (population born from 1977 to 1994), and 75% of Baby Boomers (population born from 1946 to 1964) utilize the internet on a daily basis (MNI Targeted media inc. 2015). **Therefore, with Encompass Head Starts limited presence** (limited meaning having an outdated website and **no** online application form for people to submit), **they are limiting themselves from potential participants**, and in doing so, making themselves less accessible for families to utilize their services. Having a presence online will also lessen the burden for people who may not have a means of transportation. The only way to apply for Encompass Head Start is to turn in a paper

application; People without transportation will have to make a special trip to Head Starts main office just to turn in the application. Eventually they will have to make another trip to turn in missing documents and for the in-person interview. By having an online application form available, that will be one less trip a parent will have to take in order to apply. It would also benefit families who work during the hours of operation for Encompass Head Starts offices. Those parents would be able to turn in an application form without having to miss work.

The Consequences

A consequence of the under enrollment is less children who can utilize Head Starts services will not be able to if funding is cut. Head Start implements research based curriculums and teaching practices (ECLKC, 2018) ;This implies the teaching methods produce positive results. As we know, according to the report “The long-term results of the Head Start program” (Schanzenbach & Bauer, 2016), Head Start increases the probability of its participants to graduate from high school, pursue higher education, and to graduate from college. In fact, Head Start increases its participants chances of completing higher education by 4-12 % (Schanzenbach & Bauer, 2016). According to Schanzenbach & Bauer, “Head Start not only enhances eventual educational attainment, but also has a lasting positive impact on behavioral outcomes including self-control and self-esteem” (2016).

According to Ramona McCabe (2016), Head Start is serving more and more families with traumas. Children who live these social injustices such as poverty and

homelessness are already at a disadvantage, and Head Start wants those children to be just as prepared as a child who is fortunate not to live these injustices.

According to the website of the US Department of Health and Human services, on its **Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center** section of the website (2018), if the pattern of under enrollment continues, for an agency like Encompass Head Start, a sequence of events would happen that would eventually lead to funding cuts. Head Start is required to report on a monthly basis its number of enrollment. After four consecutive months of under enrollment were reported to the regional office, Encompass Head Start received an Underenrollement letter (ECLKC, 2018). Head Start had to develop a plan with the regional office to address the under enrollment. After twelve months of having the plan implemented, Head Start was not able to keep 97 % of enrollment, which lead to the Office of Head Start designating Encompass Head Start as **Chronically under enrolled** (ECLKC, 2018). Unfortunately, when a grantee is categorized as Chronically under enrolled, they can have their funding **withheld**, **recaptured**, or **reduced** (ECLKC, 2018) if enrollment can not be brought up.

Causes	Problem	Consequences
Limited online presence	Parents have difficulty finding information about	Less enrollment

	Encompass Head Start/ potential participants not enrolling	
Teen parents not being informed of programs/ teen parents not enrolling children in programs	Children do not participate/ receive services from Encompass Head Start	Children are less prepared for their future education/ children are more likely to reenter a cycle of poverty

Capstone project description and justification

Creating Access with an Online Form

This capstone project was about designing a user-friendly online application form for the Home Base program for Early Head Start. We are starting on a narrow platform because this would be the pilot application form. The reason for the online form is to provide another medium of obtaining applications from potential participants for the program. Ramona McCabe (mentor at Encompass Head Start) discussed how one method of turning in an application might not work for one family, but it might work for another (McCabe, 2018). She explained the different ways they collect applications, however, they are all paper applications. Having an online application form available

has the potential to knock down a barrier for potential participants who turning in a paper application might not be the most convenient method for them. This especially resonates with the younger generation of parents, being for the most part, everything is online and they might feel it is more convenient to fill out the application online rather than to leave their home, pick up a paper application, fill it out, to then return to Encompass Head Starts office to drop it off. Another reason for this online application was it would be helpful for people who might not always have access to transportation. With the online form, that would be one less trip they would have to take in order to get their child enrolled. It was made sure the online form was compatible with smartphones.

As of the beginning of the 2018 Fall semester, the first step in this process was to research methods and best practices when converting a paper application into an online form. That went on from September seventh to September 30th. On October fifth, there was a training on ChildPlus (the platform the online form would be submitted) to be familiarized with the software. The following step was to design the online form, along with the help of the ERSEA team, and be done by October 19th. The launch day was pushed back until October 30th but the original launch date was October 19th. On December 1st, the data (the number of forms submitted online) was be collected to be analyzed. It was assessed if the online form was a success or not.

An obstacle that was encountered was not having enough time to complete all the tasks on the one semester time crunch being experienced. Having only a semester to

research the non-profit, prepare a capstone, and implement it was challenging. Other challenges faced were parents not being aware of the online form being live, leading to the low amount of online applications submitted. There was also not a lot of time to get familiar with ChildPlus, therefore, the reason for the launch date being pushed back.

Project Results

The expected outcome was for there to be online applications submitted whether the amount was low or high.

The number of online applications collected from October 30th to November 29th, was one application. This number was compared to the online applications submitted last year (October 30, 2017- November 29, 2017). There was an increase in applications submitted, meaning the project was a success. The project did what it was supposed to do which was to bring in applications through a different medium.

The data was collected on ChildPlus. The software ChildPlus also acts as a database storing past applications, and was also able to store the new online application submitted.

Although the number of applications submitted was low, the capstone project was still a success because the agency gained valuable tools as a result of the work that was put into this project.

Now, Encompass Head Start has an online application form that if they wanted to, the rest of their programs could adopt the same format. They also have a bigger presence online that was not there before helping with their ongoing recruitment.

The other tool that was gained was now they have a bigger photo library of Head Start children. As a side project, after obtaining permission slips of the children in Head Start, a photo shoot was performed in order to utilize the childrens photos for recruitment and media purposes. The intern went to two sites (Ludlow in Felton Ca, and Basking 1 in Aptos CA) and spent about six hours in total taking pictures of the children. Now Encompass Head Start has over 600 photos to choose from when making flyers, pamphlets, presentations, and social media post.

Something else that came from this project was the recognition of this regions Regional manager of Head Start. Another side project created by the intern was postcards with information about Early Head Starts Home Base program, and with a QR code that when scanned by a smartphone, would pull up the online application form. She would share the idea of the QR code to other regional managers to share with their Head Start/ Early Head Start programs that share the same issue of under enrollment.

As mentioned before briefly, the biggest limitation to this project was the limited amount of time. The whole capstone project was planned and implemented with one semester. That definitely accounts for the low amount of online applications submitted. However, having two supportive mentors helped point the intern in the right direction. They always had great input, but also let the intern take the lead and initiative when it came to ideas and side projects. Having regular supervision (every two weeks) also helped the intern

stay on task and gave her the chance to voice concerns or questions when they would arise. A lot of scheduling and planning helped the intern remember all the task she had to perform because most of the tasks were time sensitive, and there was no room to waste time.

Conclusion and recommendation for agency

This projects purpose was to add another means of collecting applications for Early Head Starts Home Base program. That was achieved with the launching of its online form. This form of application retrieval should stay with the agency. It had a slow start, however I am confident if Encompass Head Start is more present online, it will have an impact on its problem of under enrollment it has been facing.

I hope more interns are sent to Encompass Head Start so they could continue with this project. I only had a semester to pull this project together; my hope is another student continues it, but with more time on their hands. They could continue to develop the actual form, or they could focus more on advertising the Early Head Start Home Base program. What I recommend someone does is add the applications for Head Start and Early Head Start toddler centers online. I laid out the groundwork for future projects, everyone after me just has to add to it and make it their own, and make it better.

Personal reflection

In the few months I was with Encompass Head Start, I swam in knowledge. I learned what the application process consist of and why sometimes it takes a while to place children. I learned the process of being labeled Chronically Under Enrolled and what that consist of and how that can affect the agency. I familiarized myself on the impact

this program has on its target audience. I had the chance to visit two sites and observe the teachers interact and teach the children valuable skills that perhaps, they wouldn't have learned at home. I was delighted to see how bright the children were and at such a young age (3 years old and below), they knew numbers and many colors.

Seeing how Head Start works, makes me see why my capstone was important.

Educational services that are free are available to the families in Santa Cruz county, but seeing the issue of under enrollment makes me think of the families not taking advantage of this program, because it is not just another day care program; it's a daycare with a holistic approach to education, children's health, and the families well being, which is vital to these children's future success.

I myself am a product of Head Start and Early Head Start Home Base. I thank the program for taking part in the development of my first few years of life. In fact, Head Start continues to take part of my development, that is, professional development. I am grateful for this. Head Start works.

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Appendix

a. Scope of work

Task	Deliverable	Due on
Research relevant information (the program/tips on designing the application)	No deliverable except the knowledge I have gained	9/30/18
Meet with Veronica for ChildPlus info	No deliverable except the knowledge I have gained	10/5/18
Designing process (meeting with Head Start staff for assistance)	The completed design of the application before launching it online	10/19/18
Launching the online application	The application being on Head Starts website	10/19/18
Gather results (that are now in!) after about a month after launch	No deliverable except the data that I would analyze	11/16/18
Analyze data collected	The data analysis	12/1/18
Write final report on capstone	Final report is the deliverable	12/10/18